



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Rhode Island Grown, Take Some Home!

Air Date: August 6, 2006

Background

The agriculture industry in Rhode Island – nearly 900 farms that generate more than \$100 million annually -- is not only an integral part of the state's economy but provides a valuable contribution to Rhode Island's open space and quality of life. DEM is responsible for a broad range of programs aimed at curbing the disappearance of agricultural land and supporting the economic viability of farming in RI. In the past 20 years, with state bond funds and federal funds, and in concert with partners including municipalities, land trusts, and non-profit agencies, the state has preserved 70 farms in Rhode Island, totaling 5,036 acres.

All Rhode Islanders can help preserve the states' farms by purchasing locally grown products from local farmers' markets and roadside stands. The Department's Division of Agriculture promotes and markets 26 farmers' markets and approximately 47 roadside stands throughout the state, as well as a number of other farm viability projects and programs like Rhody Fresh Milk and local meats, etc.

The Benefits of Buying Locally

Farmers' markets and roadside stands have been a source of fresh locally grown fruits and vegetables for many years. They feature the very best of what Rhode Island farmers have to offer at reasonable prices. At farmers' markets and stands, buyer and grower have the chance to meet face-to-face. Farmers have a great deal of information on food production, nutrition and preparation and they are more than willing to share this information with consumers. Markets are very diverse and may include everything from vegetables and plants to dairy products, baked goods, and jellies and jams. Some markets provide space for craftspeople and others. Many markets and stands become a social event as well as a place for business and trade.

Local produce available at farmers' markets and roadside stands is fresh and more nutritious. In most cases, produce is picked that morning and sold the same day. In contrast, most US produce is picked 4-7 days prior to hitting supermarket shelves resulting in produce that contains fewer nutrients. Local products are also better for the environment. Cargo ships, airplanes and trucks burn lots of



Local produce at a Rhode Island Farmers' Market

fossil fuels to transport goods. Buying locally reduces the amount of air pollution from transportation. Packaging is often needed to protect produce from damage, contamination and tampering during transportation and storage. Buying locally eliminates or reduces the energy and resources needed to manufacture and dispose of packaging.

Farmers have been hit especially hard this year with more than 16 inches of rain in May and June, so it's even more important than ever to support local farmers' markets and roadside stands. Rhode Island has appealed to the US Secretary of Agriculture for a disaster declaration, which will make benefits available to some farmers to offset losses. All Northeastern states are expected to do the same.

DEM Sponsored Farmers Markets

Seven farmers markets, organized by the Division, are located in state parks and campgrounds and on state properties. The state-sponsored markets alone have generated an estimated \$500,000 of income yearly for Rhode Island farmers, not counting the added sales at farm stands due to customer and vendor relationships at the markets. All DEM Farmers' Markets accepts farmers' market checks from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) as well as coupons from the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program distributed by DEM through senior centers.

More Information for Consumers

- DEM' RI Grown Website (www.rigrown.ri.gov)
- *Rhode Island Agriculture Guide*, published by DEM, lists local farms, roadside stands and farmers' markets by location as well when specific products are available
- Look for Rhode Island Grown Logo (right)



Interviewees:

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